

Chapter I

Getting Ready Early Trials The Loss of a Member Packing The Big Move The Loss of Another Member Transportation Hotel

Of course it wasn't quite that easy. I'm in my personal Golden Age of Travel, with all the benefits of the traveler, but few to none of the responsibilities. Tons of electrons and photons were whisk across the globe resulting in the necessary mountain of paperwork that not only tells you how and when you'll get to where you will be, but grants you the permission leave where you are. We have Chris and Victoria to thank for that.

This is not to say my time was without trials and tribulation. As usual I was able to look deep within my heart and find a number of simple items which apparently do not exist on this Earth. I walked through every checkout lane in a Wal-Mart looking for Peppermint Altoids with no luck whatsoever.

I visited numerous stores (including, I'm ashamed to say, and quite maddened also) a Bed, Bath, and Beyond looking for a fishnet bag. NO not a bag for a fishnet, but a bag MADE OF a fishnetty material. Strings, tied together at intervals resulting in diamond shaped holes approximately 2 inches across. That's all I wanted. Very simple. I got a perfect one at Wal-Mart just before I went to Costa Rica. Never mind what I wanted it for. It's a simple item, surely exists somewhere. But alas no. The best part is that I don't think anyone ever understood what it was I looking for. In defeat I went to Academy sporting goods and bought actual replacement fishnet bags. Of course they only had three 26 inch bags, so I also got a 22 inch bag.

And finally there was the FULL 180 Degree Fisheye lense. We'll talk about that

later. I'm still quite angered about that one.

At the trips conception, the travelers consisted of Chris, Victoria, Alexey, Matt, and myself. Possible additional participants included Stephanie, Erin, and Charlie and Sue Staines. Stephanie decided to stay and work on her mountains of research, but Erin and the Staines' decided to hitch their wagon to our train. This makes a party of eight. Unfortunately about a week before our



Victoria

departure Alexey (who is Belorussian) had determined that in order to satisfy all the requirements of leaving the US, entering Taiwan, then leaving Taiwan, and again entering the US, he would have to juggle knives, dance for the Queen, and possibly recite MacBeth from memory. In short, the



Chris with improperly deployed pillow.

paperwork Alexey had to do to come on the trip would be slightly harder than choosing his own parents. As the only sane one in the lab, his presence is sorely missed.

On my last few expeditions I took about 170-180 pounds of luggage, both personal and collecting gear. The limit was 70 lbs. per bag, plus there was my carry-on, vest, and pants pockets. This trip is entirely different. Each bag was limited to 50 lbs. Big collecting gear like blacklights, gallons of Low Tox antifreeze, battery packs, vials, flight intercept traps, etc. would be taken, so I was limited to one personal bag. I gathered and culled to obtain a bag (weighing 60 lbs.) that contained all my personal effects (clothes, etc.) and all my personal collecting gear as well. One extravagance I brought was an extra gallon of Low Tox antifreeze. I wrapped it in some pants and taped them up. Security was nice enough to re-tape the pants after they checked to see what I had.

Stronger tape too. Matt was nice enough to take a few pounds off of me, and we got the bag down to 53 lbs. just before the flight.

An added complication concerned our living arrangement after a return from Taiwan. Matt's lease ends on July 31st. We'll be returning from Taiwan on July 31st. At night. So his stuff had to be stored before departure. So after returning from the Smokys, but before Taiwan (a span of 9 days) we moved all his stuff into my apartment, which, although not cramped, is certainly no longer spacious. This, of course, added somewhat to the packing complications.

Chris gets an "I told you so." Chris was in a pessimistic mood and commented that probably not everyone had a valid passport. Victoria, to prove him wrong, phoned around and make sure everyone did. Turns out, Erin had an expired passport that was residing with her mother in Washington State. So, with less than 10 days to go, the



Lunch in Detroit

passport is overnight FedExed to Louisiana, then placed in the care of a company that, for a FEE, will overnight FedEx the passport (8am delivery!) to be renewed and then FedExed back. The tolerances of this exercise were absolute, not a day to spare.

Unfortunately, the little man filling out the paperwork checked the 10am delivery box instead of the 8am. This 2 hour difference sunk the whole enterprise. So we lost Erin, but luckily, she'll be arriving only two days late.

Up at 4am. To Chris's house by 4:30am. Baton Rouge Airport at 5am. Check in. Take off for Memphis, Tennessee at 6am. Land at Memphis at 7:30am. Meet up with the Staines'. Take off for Detroit, Michigan at 8:30am. Arrive at Detroit around noon. Leave for Osaka, Japan at 3:40pm. Thirteen hours later we landed in Japan around 5:30pm. This was my first flight across the Pacific where it was day the entire time. I got to watch Curious George, not too bad. A one hour layover and we took off for Taiwan, landing at 9:40pm local time. One lost bag. A box, really, with all our black lighting equipment, plus flight intercept traps. We were picked up by Wen-jer Wu, who was kind enough to bring two vehicles.



Hotel at last!

We made it to the Leader Hotel by 11:15pm. Check in was a breeze. It's a circular hotel with a large growth at the bottom which houses the restaurant. Matt and I are sharing a room, nice view, mini fridge, big TV, internet. The bath room is amazing, and the shower even more so.

We've been up for about 28 hours so falling asleep wasn't much of a problem. Breakfast lasts until 10am, so no need to get up early.